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ABSTRACT

During the middle school years, young adolescent students can use reading to help answer profound questions about themselves and the world. It is during the middle school years that most students refine their reading preferences; become sophisticated readers of informational text; and lay the groundwork for the lifelong reading habits they will use in their personal, professional, and civic lives. With good instruction, ample time, and opportunity to read across a variety of types of texts, young adolescents can become successful readers both in and out of the school setting. This position paper states that schools should provide the following: Continuous reading instruction for all young adolescents; Reading instruction that is individually appropriate; Assessment that informs instruction; and Ample opportunities to read and discuss reading with others. The paper makes recommendations for improving the literacy performance of all middle level students for classroom teachers, for state/district leaders and policymakers; for school-based educators; for teacher educators; and for families and community members. (Contains a 20-item list of related resources.) (NKA)

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Supporting Young Adolescents' Literacy Learning

A JOINT POSITION STATEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION AND THE NATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

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In recent years early reading has received increased attention from policymakers, funding agencies, and educational planners. Young children must get off to a good start in reading; however, it is a serious mistake to assume that a good start is sufficient for producing confident readers. The ability to comprehend a variety of texts, to use sophisticated comprehension and study strategies, to read critically, and to develop a lifelong desire to read are not acquired entirely during the early years. A good start is critical, but not sufficient. Middle school students deserve continued and systematic instruction in reading.

It is during the middle school years that most students refine their reading preferences; become sophisticated readers of informational text; and lay the groundwork for the lifelong reading habits they will use in their personal, professional, and civic lives. During the middle school years, young adolescent students can use reading to help answer profound questions about themselves and the world. With good instruction, ample time, and opportunity to read across a variety of types of texts, young adolescents can become successful readers both in and out of the school setting.

International comparisons back this up. They consistently show that U.S. readers get off to a fast start, but that they begin to falter during early adolescence. A study released by International Educational Achievement (Elley, 1992) involved 200,000 students in 31 nations. Nine-year-olds in the United States were second only to those in Finland in reading achievement. Fourteen-year-olds in the United States, while still scoring above average, ranked ninth. Similarly, while the average scores of younger children on the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 1999) were stable, the reading scores of older students dropped.

United States elementary educators seem to do an excellent job of teaching young children to read as measured by international comparisons. However, the data indicate that the level of student performance drops off in the middle school and high school years. This drop in scores must be addressed immediately with all the resources at our disposal. Young adolescents deserve quality reading instruction so they can achieve a level of reading proficiency that will serve them well for the rest of their school careers and beyond. Therefore, schools serving young adolescents should provide the following.

Continuous reading instruction for all young adolescents

Continuous reading instruction requires that all middle school teachers understand reading and learning processes, realize the intricate and diverse needs of young adolescents, and know how to help students develop both the competence and desire to read increasingly complex materials across the curriculum. Reading strategies and skills are central to the success of the integrated, multidisciplinary middle school curriculum, and every teacher must possess the knowledge and skills to integrate reading instruction across the curriculum.

Reading instruction that is individually appropriate

Young adolescents arrive at middle school with a wide range of individual, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences that have a significant impact on their reading performance. Providing instruction that is appropriate for each student, therefore, requires well-prepared classroom teachers who integrate individualized reading instruction within their content areas. This also requires reading specialists who can help their colleagues acquire skills and techniques for delivering developmentally appropriate reading instruction in their content areas. Reading specialists are also necessary for providing intervention programs for struggling readers.

Assessment that informs instruction

Assessment plans and measures must show learners' strengths as well as their needs. The measures should help guide teachers in designing instruction that will best help them grow in reading proficiency. Large-scale assessment programs that focus on comparisons of student groups across districts, states and provinces, and nations are not sufficient. Adequate assessment measures must be supported by strong informal reading assessments that take place in classrooms and involve both teachers and students in the process. These plans must be used to shape and reshape instruction so that it meets the needs of all students.

Ample opportunities to read and discuss reading with others

Schools for young adolescents must have ready access to a wide variety of print and nonprint resources that will foster in students independence, confidence, and a lifelong desire to read. Because middle school students are a diverse group, care must be taken to include material that will appeal to linguistically and culturally diverse students. Librarians and media specialists are important partners who can ensure access for all adolescents. All school-based professionals must have sufficient knowledge of reading materials to provide guidance for adolescents in selecting reading materials. Students must have many opportunities to choose reading materials that are interesting and engaging. School-based professionals should model reading in various forms, have a love of reading, and possess the skills needed to help students progress toward mastery in all aspects of reading.

Call to action

Because of the importance of reading and literacy, the International Reading Association and the National Middle School Association urge classroom teachers, school-based educators, educational policymakers, and family and community members to take the following actions to improve the literacy performance of all middle level students.

Recommendations for Classroom Teachers

- Engage in whole-school planning to implement components of a successful school- or district-wide literacy learning plan that is integrative and interdisciplinary.
- Collaborate with administrators, librarians, guidance counselors, intervention specialists, and other school-based educators to improve reading instruction and achievement.
- Interpret assessment data and make information available to other teachers and school-based educators.
- Provide opportunities for students to read material they choose and to be read to each school day.

Recommendations for State/District Leaders and Policymakers

- Provide needed funding for schools to implement high-quality literacy programs.
- Provide needed funding to ensure that all young adolescents are surrounded in their classrooms and school libraries by a plethora of new, interesting, and diverse reading materials.
- Provide funding for staff development of all school personnel so they understand how to integrate reading instruction across content areas and school settings.
- Work to enact legislation that will further school- and district-wide efforts to improve student reading achievement.
- Provide mentoring opportunities for new teachers so they can learn ways of supporting young adolescent literacy learning.

Recommendations for School-Based Educators

- Become knowledgeable about literacy learning.
- Provide professional development opportunities so all teachers are able to facilitate literacy learning in all curricular areas.
- Provide modeling and coaching to introduce new instructional strategies for integrating reading instruction across all subjects.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to read to students during the school day.
- Guide students in selecting books to read and provide for multiple opportunities to respond to texts in writing.
- Know what to look for in good literacy-learning classrooms.
- Coordinate efforts for improved literacy learning in schools and districts.
- Integrate literacy throughout the curriculum, recognizing the multidisciplinary nature of reading instruction.

Recommendations for Teacher Educators

- Provide both preservice and inservice teachers with an understanding of the literacy-learning process, a repertoire of strategies for enhancing learning in the content areas, and methods for improving vocabulary development.
- In partnership with schools, provide professional development opportunities for all teachers to become expert reading instructors in their content areas.
- Model good reading instructional practices in college and university classrooms.

Recommendations for Families and Community Members

- Be positive role models for reading and writing.
- Provide an abundance of reading materials and exhibit a positive attitude about reading and writing.
- Encourage young adolescents to read.
- Be engaged as partners with the school in the academic lives of adolescents.

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Related Resources From the National Middle School Association

Books

Rothemiel, D. (1996). Starting Points: How to Set Up and Run a Writing Workshop

Schurr, S., & Lounsbury, J. (2001). Staff Development Kit #3: Revitalizing Teaming to Improve Student Learning

Vatterott, C. (1999). Academic Success Through Student Empowerment

Wheetock, A. (1998). Safe To Be Smart: Building a Culture for Standards-Based Reform In the Middle Grades

Woods, K.D., & Harmon, J.M. (2001). Strategies for Integrating Reading and Writing In Middle and High School Classrooms

Journal Articles

Blachowicz, C., & Ogle, D.M. (2001). Finding a starting point: Using assessment to guide reading Instruction. *Middle Ground*, 5(2), 38-40.

Erickson, C., & Stretling, A. (2001). Make every teacher a reading teacher. *Middle Ground*, 5(2), 33-37.

Harmon, J.M., & Woods, K.D. (2001) The TAB Book Club Approach: Talking (T) about (A) books (B) in content area classrooms. *Middle School Journal*, 32(3), 30-34.

Irvin, J.L. (1999, February). Don't just stick to the plot... Teach students how to read expository text, too! *Middle Ground*, 2(3), 31-33.

Wormell, R. (2001). Reading between the lines. *Middle Ground*. 5(2), 29-31.

Related Resources From the International Reading Association

Books

Brozo, W.G. (2002). *To Be a Boy, To Be a Reader: Engaging Teen and Preteen Boys in Active Literacy*

Buehl, D. (2001). *Classroom Strategies for Interactive Learning*, Second Edition

Moje, E.B. (2000). *"All the Stories That We Have": Adolescents' Insights About Literacy and Learning in Secondary Schools*

Moore, D.W., Alvermann, D.E., & Hinchman, K.A. (Eds.). (1999). *Struggling Adolescent Readers: A Collection of Teaching Strategies*

Rycik, J.A., & Irvin J.L. (Eds.). (2001). *What Adolescents Deserve: A Commitment to Students' Literacy Learning*

Journal Articles

Faust, M.A., & Glenzer, N. (2000). "I could read those parts over and over": Eighth graders rereading to enhance enjoyment and learning with literature. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 44*, 234–239.

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Ivey, G., & Broaddus, K. (2000). Tailoring the fit: Reading instruction and middle school readers. *The Reading Teacher, 54*, 68–78.

Moje, E.B., Young, J.P., Readence, J.E., & Reinking, D.W. (2000). Reinventing adolescent literacy for new times: Perennial and millennial issues, *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 43*, 400–410.

Vacca , R.T. (1998). Let's not marginalize adolescent literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 41*, 604–609.

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